

**Using Memory Triggers to Analyze Potential Prejudice in the Classroom:
A Critical Auto-ethnographical Approach to Teacher Preparation**

**Dr. Sarah M. Straub, Hannah Bell, Chloe Goetsch, Amy Kitzman, Bethany Lankford,
Kendall Moore, Alexa Ochoa Velasquez, Gehrig Rock**

Department of Elementary Education

Stephen F. Austin State University

Introduction

There is no shortage of blog postings listing all of the reasons people become teachers. It can be something as altruistic as, “I struggled grasping concepts when I was a kid and I didn’t have teachers who supported me, so I want to be that person for my students” to as stereotypical as, “I wanted summer vacations.” If the reader is leaning towards the unselfish rationale for becoming a future educator, it still predicated itself on the assumption that the future educator is going to become the teacher he or she wanted. Too often, we fail to think about what our future students will need and we fail to consider what baggage we are bringing into the classroom that will affect them.

Background of the Problem

I first noticed this as an issue for me in my very first year teaching. Even though it is nearly twelve years ago, I still vividly remember it. I noticed that I favored my students that spoke Spanish over my monolingual students. I favored my students that played soccer over the ones that did not join the pitch during recess. I strongly was inclined against loud yelling and so my punishments were more severe towards my louder students. I could disregard my prejudice by

using the platitude, “we can’t get along with everyone” but that would be a major disservice. In a time period where educators are still overwhelmingly White, female, and middle-class while our student population changes at a rapid pace, one can clearly see that prejudice unaddressed will be at the detriment of our future students. I will be analyzing myself later, but in this moment the reader is probably trying to figure me out. Good. Who do you think I am? What identities resonate the most strongly with me? What impact did/does this have on my students? And that is exactly what I pushed my own teacher candidates to do as they began their preparation program.

Purpose of the Study

As previously mentioned, the purpose of this study is for pre-service teachers to begin the process of critical self-reflection that is so necessary as they begin to gain more autonomy in their field placements and student teaching. However, a critical self-awareness is merely the first step. To truly understand the prejudice that a person has, one must seek to discover *why* this prejudice exists and from *where* it comes. Prejudice is internal and it can be argued that an internal belief does not have an impact on external relationships. Prejudice, unfortunately, often manifests as discrimination or prejudice. If a teacher can authentically examine his/her/their prejudice, then perhaps the outcome can be a less discriminatory classroom culture.

Research Questions

Throughout the course of this paper, the teacher candidates are seeking to answer the following research questions:

1. How have past experiences impacted prejudice?
2. How will this realization impact the future classroom?

Definition of Terms

The teacher candidates in my course began by establishing a common definition for terms. By beginning with the same foundation, the class was able to engage in conversations that were more critical and complex, rather than a conversation spent arguing over terminology. To that effect, there are several terms and definitions with which the reader must be familiar. The majority of these definitions come from Sensoy & DiAngelo's (2017) work *Is everyone really equal: An introduction to key concepts in social justice education*. The word "prejudice" comes with a lot of baggage. And, when that word is directed at you as an individual, the most common response is to recoil and declare it untrue. In our class, we discuss how these emotions can actually stop a conversation from even beginning, especially if we do not see to understand them. Thus, common definitions help to cool the flare of emotions that comes up. Prejudice is simply the "learned prejudgment about members of social groups to which we don't belong. Prejudice is based on limited knowledge or experience with the group. Simplistic judgments and assumptions are made and projected onto everyone from that group" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, pg. 51). If you re-read that sentence and think about yourself, you can see this to be true and not a cause for alarm. It is true that we each have not spent a considerable amount of time with *every* other group there is in our communities. It is true that we still have some sort of idea about these groups, even if we do not interact with them. That is prejudice and we ALL have it.

Another definition that we must agree on for the purpose of using this method of critical self-reflection is discrimination. Discrimination is "**action** based on prejudice toward others. When we act on our prejudgments, we are discriminating" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, pg. 54). To explain this with an example, one of the most common prejudices I have heard used in my life is the one against people who are unhoused. We think that there is a level of danger,

perhaps. Or, we think that this current situation of being unhoused is through that person's personal shortcomings and we either view the person with mistrust or disgust. Then, we act - as simply as crossing the street, locking the car door, rolling up the window. That is discrimination and we ALL do it.

Literature Review

This entire process of autoethnographical reflection is based on a critical social justice theoretical framework. An autoethnography is a way of writing about one's personal experiences with the intent to understand it in a systematic and cultural context. It is described as both a process and a product (Ellis, Adams, Bochner, 2010). This is because while one is creating a project, through the process they are analyzing their own biases, connecting them systematically and hopefully using them to strive to improve the writer, reader, and culture at large (Adams, Holman, & Ellis, 2013). Autoethnography is important to this project because it is critical that we not only address personal experience with critical topics but realize there is a broader picture behind our smaller experiences. We must put things in a cultural perspective.

An additional component to this research is the critical social justice lens. Critical theory can partially credit its origins to the "Frankfurt School" which identified the goal to be examining and offering a criticism of society with the goal being social change (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Critical theory acknowledges that there are systems of oppression and only through analyzing these systems in a critical way can society change for the better.

While this section merely presenting a quick look at the foundations for teacher self-reflection, a richer definition of narrative inquiry, self-study, and memory-work is offered in the methodology section. The teacher candidates themselves will also include more research specifically aligned to their area of focus.

Methodology

Introduction

There are two main buckets that must be fleshed out in order to understand the framework from which these self-studies emerged. First, the teacher candidates had to engage in a form of narrative inquiry. For the majority of the participants, it was their first exposure to any form of qualitative research. To that effect, I will begin by describing Narrative Inquiry within the field of teacher education. I will then continue with a brief explanation of self-study in teacher education. To truly understand the complexity of this process, I will next look at memory-work in an ethnographical lens -- studying the past in a way that recognizes its significance to the present and future teacher development (Coia & Taylor, 2006).

Narrative Inquiry

According to Butler-Kisber (2010), Narrative Inquiry began as a framework adopted by anthropologists and later modified and adapted to other fields in the liberal sciences. It was famously incorporated into the realm of teacher education by various researchers including Connelly and Clandinin (1990, 1994, 1999). The goal of Narrative Inquiry is to “[allow] for a conversation about and with oneself with the goal of humanization and bringing meaning to everyday events” (Benoit, 2015, pg. 43). By adopting this structure, teachers are given the opportunity to challenge the status quo and evoke change in how teachers interact with students and the curriculum.

Self-Study and Memory-Work

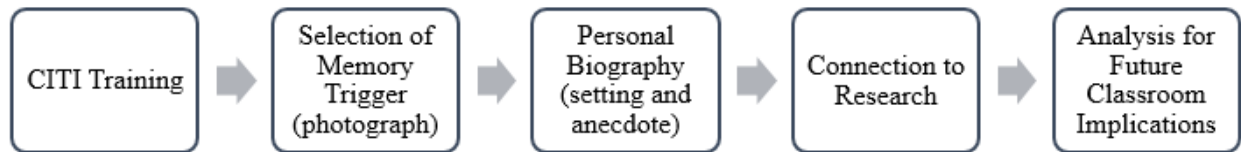
Each teacher candidate was meant to incorporate biography in their reflections. Norman Denzin (2008) suggested that biography was a learning tool that allowed him to re-experience events in his past. This type of reflection can be replicated so that others can reflect on their own

experiences. And, it is linked to the understanding of one's "teacher-self". Too often, teachers feel as though they cannot bring their authentic selves into their classrooms. However, this is impossible. One's personal prejudices will find a way to ooze into teacher behavior. Therefore, self-study is an opportunity for teachers to evaluate themselves and work for a change that will potentially have a positive effect on others (Pithouse-Morgan, Mitchell, & Pillay, 2014). The goal is to analyze personal identity and prejudice in a way to reshape existing detrimental prejudices so as to be beneficial to others.

This type of deep self-analysis is made a bit easier through the use of memory triggers. A memory trigger is an image or photograph that can evoke details about a personal event that has occurred in the past. The teacher candidates will deconstruct their past experiences in an attempt to reinterpret and reevaluate how these experiences have shaped personal identity (Kelly, 2013). The goal is to examine the event not just in terms of what happened in that specific moment, but to seek to understand the social forces at play.

Research Design

The majority of teacher candidates engaged in this self-study had never participated in research before this course. Because of this, each student was required to complete a Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program for Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research. From that foundation, teacher candidates learned the basic elements of qualitative research and narrative inquiry. The way it was presented to teacher candidates was as an autoethnographical approach. Using this language, the teacher candidates knew that there was both a biographical component and a historical/social component for analysis.



Teacher candidates began by selecting a memory trigger that they either had access to from their cell phones, social media pages, or home photo albums. Then, they had an opportunity to write about the memory and about the setting in which this memory occurred. Next, the teacher candidates worked to make meaning of this experience by grounding it in research or connecting it to some form of informed knowledge. Lastly, teacher candidates used these memories to construct a potential positive outcome for their future students.

Participants

Each of these participants were members of a convenience sample. The participants were declared elementary education majors and enrolled in a course focusing on social and environmental foundations. Each student enrolled in the course submitted their papers at the end of the semester, and the following semester, I sent a message asking if any of them were interested in continuing this process with me. The following students answered that call: Hannah, Amy, Chloe, Kendall, Bethany, Gehrig and Alexa. As the reader continues through this paper, please note that the person narrating will continue to change. So far, the narrator has been me - Sarah Straub. However, each section will be shared in the voice of the teacher candidate it represents. I have not changed their names as they are co-authors with me, but I have changed all other identifiers.

Hannah will begin by describing her memory trigger that led to a deeper understanding of environmental injustice in the wake of Hurricane Harvey. Amy will continue by analyzing the intersectionality of race/ethnicity and religion in a public school setting. Chloe will focus on the classism that resulted from experiences with a “nontraditional family structure” (i.e.

divorce). Kendall will critique her experiences with learning differences and ableism. Gehrig will describe his experiences and awareness with regards to race and racism in a border town. Bethany will deconstruct her experiences with learned gender norms. Alexa will conclude with a memory trigger that focused on the positive realizations of *how* to address classism.

Data Collection/Data Analysis

Hannah's Story



Figure 1: *This was me jumping outside of my high school (EXTREMELY excited) because the next day would be the FIRST day our school got to go back to our brand new, non-flooded and fixed high school after Hurricane Harvey*

Little did my family and I realize that when the day of August 27, 2017 started, Kingwood would look drastically different and never be the same. Hurricane Harvey was affecting different areas at different times, and we just did not think it would have any effect on us, but that was soon to change. The flood gates from Conroe were opened Sunday early morning and now began flooding my hometown of Kingwood, TX. I had friends wake up at 1:00 AM to their houses full of two to seven feet of water and their only way of escaping was climbing up to the roof, and waiting for a boat to rescue them. My dad was an Assistant Principal

at my high school so he was constantly trying to figure out ways to boat, kayak, or just any means of transportation to check on the high school. My friend kayaked to the school and sent me the first picture of it completely submerged under water. My dad was heartbroken that our school had flooded. Once the waters went down, the superintendent had to make a game plan.

Our entire school community would now be relocated to another school about fifteen miles away, but in the wonderful rush hour traffic, it was about an hour and fifteen minute drive each way. Anyway, that was not even the worst part of it. I began to realize the ‘strategy’ that different cities around Houston used to divert the flood waters to specific, low income cities. When the flood waters would soon be hitting Katy, the officials diverted the water flow to the poverty stricken neighborhoods so it would not hit the upper-class neighborhood. This began to teach me about environmental justice.

Environmental justice is “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies” (EPA, 2019). It was the people in charge of the flood and its diversions that purposefully set it up for the low-income families to suffer. While this was potentially not done with malicious intent, it does highlight the lack of regard for equity in which our flood management systems were developed.

This really began to open my eyes to the realization that a person’s income level can result in ending up with the short end of the stick in simply any given situation. Before this, I thought you could just be at a disadvantage economically but even behind that there are deeper meanings. The person of authority in this matter not only is privileged economically, but also has

the power to ensure that a severe weather situation does not impact the relative safety of his/her own family.

Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty by Gorski (2018) was trying to get the point across that there are major differentiations between various economic stratospheres. Gorski states, “odds are high that individuals will fall into the same class as their parents” (Gorski 2018). And, he goes on to explain that as awesome as the rags to riches stories are, they are extremely uncommon and just are not our reality. It then goes on to state, that odds are constantly stacked against these students and their families. Additionally, a study conducted by Chakraborty, Collins, and Grineski (2019), found that flooding as a result of Hurricane Harvey and flood management decisions was significantly greater in neighborhoods with Black and socioeconomically deprived residents. The authors suggest that society must begin to address the inequitable social consequences.

Not only did I learn about the environmental impacts this had but this could also be done by teachers to their students in a social sense. I will take this into the teaching field with me because well, it obviously played a major part in my hometown story; however, even more than that, it taught me how teachers could put students, based on their income, at a disadvantage and divert negative things their way - just like the people of authority diverted the devastating flood waters towards a selected group of people. As a teacher, I want to make sure to go into my classroom without prejudices and without targeting certain groups which puts them at a big disadvantage. What happened in Katy, TX during Harvey showed me how people of authority can take advantage of those without power and as a teacher the parents/students may see me as the authority and highest source of power, and I would never want them to think I was taking advantage of them; therefore, one of the major takeaways that the hurricane taught me was to be

conscious of my actions and in order to make the world a better place, when I am in positions of authority, not to take advantage of that fact and treat every student, family and faculty with the utmost respect and equality that they deserve.

Amy's Story

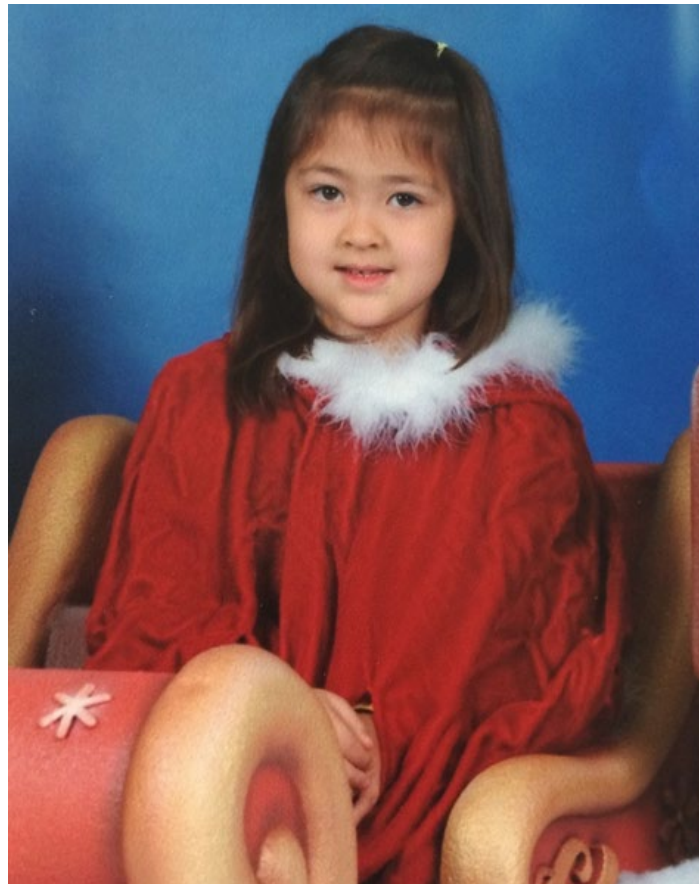


Figure 2: Preschool Holiday Picture (2003)

It was mid-December and a letter was sent home with me from Mother's Day Out preschool program stating to "please dress your child in their favorite holiday attire for our pictures tomorrow." Naturally, my Japanese speaking mother asked me what my favorite holiday was and I responded with "Halloween!" The next day, I proudly went to school wearing my favorite pumpkin shirt, but to my teachers horror, it wasn't what they were anticipating. When they said holiday, they meant Christmas holiday outfit. My mom had already left, so they ended

up finding a random piece of red fabric and a white boa to put around me. In *figure 2*, the orange shirt is still visible by the right side of my neck and at my sleeves. They never told my mom about my incident, and I didn't think anything of it. When the pictures came back and I showed my mom she was shocked to see my outfit. She then asked me what happened and I told her everything.

Despite it just being a simple miscommunication, it is a larger issue of teachers not understanding family situations. In a documentary called *Cracking the Code: The System of Racial Inequity*, Butler (2014) discussed how miscommunications arise by not being attentive to everyone's needs. As an educator or someone in a leadership position must understand the circumstances of the people that they are working with. This would have meant in the situation at my preschool to have clearer guidelines. I was able to relate in an opposite way as some people are treated differently for being a different race, we were just not considered.

I still remember this incident vividly, but what it made me realize was that as an educator we have to accommodate for everyone from all walks of life. Especially in this issue, it means that when giving directions or requests they have to be very specific. Things like examples or visuals would have been very helpful. My mom didn't know better. She didn't know what the teachers wanted, but all of the other English native moms knew exactly what the teacher meant. Even just minor issues like this put non English speaking parents at a disadvantage, and their students don't know any better than just to follow their parents lead. This can create social issues for the student if their peers make fun of them, like mine did, and also unintentionally hinder the student's ability to be a part of activities. As an educator, I hope to meet and communicate with the parents constantly. I'd want to set up beginning of the year conferences and then periodically check in with them and have constant communication like through newsletters and blogs, but

also meet with parents when they are able to. It not only good for the parents, but also students can gain a sense of confidence if their parents come home and say “wow your teacher had great things to say about you!” This line of communication will help keep things consistent and best benefit the student.

Chloe’s Story



Figure 3: My elementary school hallway

The photo above shows my first Elementary School. I went there for Kindergarten through third grade. It was an all-White school in an all-White town; the town was a middle-class town surrounded by lower income towns. Because of this, the less affluent students went to other schools. The photograph shows the main hall of the school; every grade was represented by a different color. When I was going there, my brother and sister also went there so I remember being dropped off at my hallway and then them being dropped off. That is what I see when I look at this picture. Growing up and going to my elementary school before my parents got

divorced, I felt normal and like I belonged. I had everything that every other student had. Watertown was not a rich place, but all our parents made the same amount of money.

After my parents got divorced, I knew that my family was poor. It wasn't the type of poor that you look back on years later and realize but almost instantly I knew. The bank took our house and we had to move into a much smaller house, I believed that no one else would know that we were poor, and I didn't want anyone to know. Most people still had two parents and the nice house so I was embarrassed of my situation, but I thought that I could hide it. I could not. My siblings and I were put on the free and reduced lunch program and my lunch card went from a green card to a red card. I remember trying to hide my card from everyone because I didn't want people to know. I believed that I could hide the fact that my mom was working two jobs and that my oldest sister was raising us but that red card proved me wrong. Suddenly, my financial status was not just something at home it became my life.

This connects to social classism and poverty in the school system because of me being so embarrassed about being less affluent I started struggling in my classes. I was distracted all the time and my self-confidence went down because I believed that people were talking about me. In Knaus' (2011) chapter "Breaking the Silence," he says that growing up in poverty he was "constantly reminded of what I did not have." When I reflect on my elementary education, I am reminded that I was not treated the same. All my peers had support from their teachers and none of my teachers were there for me during this time, so I kept doing worse and worse on assignments.

Going through this at such a young age has made me realize that poverty can affect people of all ages and if I have a student going through poverty who feels the way I felt I can tell them that sometimes things happen to us that are out of our control and it doesn't make us less

than our peers. Because of my experience, I will be able to help kids out by having a set of classroom supplies for those who need them, and they can take them as they need them instead of having to ask me to avoid further embarrassment. I also understand that while this is just a start, true change cannot happen unless I learn how to advocate for systemic change with regards to our inequitable systems based on class.

Kendall's Story



Figure 4: My elementary school for K through 4th Grade

The picture above shows the exterior of my elementary school. I only went to this Elementary school from kindergarten through fourth grade. During this time, my teachers noticed that I was not really able to keep up with the other students, especially as I went higher up into 3rd and 4th grade. There was a teacher that realized that I had a learning difference. I was then tested and had to be pulled out of class.

All I remember was that I had to work a lot harder than anyone in my class and I felt stupid for not getting what my teachers were teaching me in class because everyone else was

getting what they were teaching, but I was not. I specifically remember being pulled out of class to with other children to have help with my b's, d's, c's, k's, and s's. The other kids and I would do certain drills that involved these letters and slowly my teacher saw improvement in my spelling and reading. I also had to be pulled out for reading, but I think I was getting further testing on my learning difference now. I would do all sorts of tasks for this teacher whether it be read a passage and answer questions that she asked or write a story in a certain time frame. To me, I felt like they were games, but now I know they were not. I got teased at school for being taken out during class to go somewhere else some people thought that I was "special" and needed extra help which was kind of embarrassing to me at the time. I even had the teacher ask me if I did not need to leave because I was missing class time which I have no idea why she asked that because she is the one who told me I was going to go to a different place and work on other things while the other students worked on something else. I felt like I was being segregated from my peers and the teacher even segregated me by singling me out during class.

Story Sauer and Jorgensen (2016) elaborate on the flaws in the LRE mandate and the requirement for a continuum, noting the disproportionate segregation of certain students with disabilities, such as students with intellectual disabilities, results in disproportionately limited school experiences. They link the cultural practice of segregating students with more obvious disabilities or intensive support needs to society's devaluation of disability, also known as "ableism." Sauer and Jorgensen talked about how people put people with disabilities down, and they belittle them. The schools segregate the students that have disabilities with the ones who do not have disabilities. I will not let my students feel like they are different from the other students because I know how they feel, and I do not want them to feel what I felt like. I am relating my experiences of being segregated from my peers for my learning differences is that I will not let

other students feel like they are stupid the way I felt I will make my class environment and environment for all students no matter what beliefs, learning difference, or any kind of difference they have from the other kids in my class.

This experience impacted me and influenced who I plan to be as a future teacher. Specifically, I will provide all the resources that I can so that my students will succeed. I never want my students to feel like they are dumb like I did when I was young. If need be, I will tutor my students myself so that they can succeed. I will give the parents extra resources on how to support their children. I will also ensure that parents are aware of their rights and the rights of their children. One way I can do this is to prepare an information night or to make sure that I translate the “legalese” of documents.

Gehrig's Story



Figure 5: Me attending a Patriot Day Parade in Del Rio with my kindergarten class.

Just like any kindergarten student arriving to an elementary school, I thought what I was about to experience would be the most important thing in the history of mankind. I wasn't too nervous about being in a school with other kids for most of the day, as I had a year or so of preschool in town. I remember that my first elementary school was a few miles outside of Del Rio right off of a highway. It sometimes felt like the longest ride ever. Del Rio is situated on the border with Mexico. The neighboring Mexican city is Ciudad Acuña. I remember that the main hallway in the school seemed very long and dark to me. My classroom was about halfway down the hallway. I remember my classroom felt a little dark, as well, but there was a lot of space for circle/carpet time, stations for playing and exploring, and our own desks, which I thought was the coolest thing in the world. As a kindergartener, I felt that everyone in my class was my friend. Most of the time we would all play together out in the playground and get along in the

classroom when we were at our stations. Going to school in a town that is so close to the Mexican border, it was not surprising to have a lot of Hispanic kids in our classes. Even with the large number of Hispanic students in my class, my best friend was white. There were a small handful of white students in my class, and I felt that I could talk to them easier than Hispanic students at times. This was one of the first instances that I can remember seeing people who looked different from me and acknowledging that they looked from me, but I couldn't exactly understand why most of my friends were white.

There are different people and different cultures that were involved in the community and in the school. Looking back, there were times where the school felt somewhat segregated, with the white students normally sticking together in certain situations, while the Hispanic students would stick together in other situations. This segregation within schools mirrors the racial segregation of society as a whole (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). While I moved away after kindergarten, I wondered if I was still living in Del Rio and going to school there if I would have still had white friends, or would I have made a considerable number of Hispanic friends. Sensoy and DiAngelo state that "White people who had a lot of childhood friends of Color rarely keep them because our schools, workplaces, and other environments channel us in separate directions" (2017, p. 147). It's concerning to realize that the reaches of systemic racism and segregation are felt by students as young as kindergartners.

As a teacher, I would like to use strategies to get students to understand that people who don't look the same as them are still people. I can provide students the chance to share stories or pictures of their home lives, holidays, festivals, and culture in a class setting or social circle if the students are comfortable with doing this. This would become a viewing window to show

students that everyone in the classroom is just as human as anyone else in the classroom, no matter how they might look.

Bethany's Story

I lived on a 5-acre plot of land that my parents owned with a vegetable garden, flower beds on the side, with lots of trees and green grass in a 3 bedroom/2 bathroom house. Once my grandparents that lived on the 5-acres next door passed away, my dad inherited half of the plot and bought the other half from his sister so that we now have all 10-acres with two houses, the second of which my two parents and I moved into as I got into high school. The house had infamous popcorn ceilings and caramel colored carpet, and we lived far enough with enough trees in-between from our neighbors to have privacy. The street and area were safe enough that you could hear gunshots in the middle of the day and immediately be assured it was just your neighbor shooting a squirrel or practicing aim in their backyard on a target with their sons. It was a beautiful street with a canopy of trees creating a nice shadow for joggers to pass through at any time of day.



Figure 6: Me and my sisters posing for an Easter picture

I am the youngest child of four, with the age gap between me and the other three being between 9 and 15 years different. Because of this, I lived the life of the youngest child (hand-me-downs galore and never quite being heard) while being as lonely as a single child having nobody to play with, but life wasn't overly difficult for me otherwise so I shouldn't complain. Left to right is Angela, my 28-year-old sister, Amy, my 30-year-old sister, and then me, 19. Not pictured is my brother, aged 34. We have the same parents and were raised under the same roof. My sisters do not look anything alike to most, but people say I look exactly like both of them, so I consider myself the one you can put in-between to make us all look related. We all grew up girly, me being their little baby/barbie doll to play dress up with from my birth. We each had different

experiences growing up, and through different challenges, we have had the opportunity to go to schooling for what we want to do in our lives. They of course are already live it by modeling and doing nutrition, or being a hairstylist while I plan to be a future educator. I think these jobs looked good to us because we liked them, but also because they are generally generic female roles that are presented to young women to pursue.

Thinking of a person's construction of identity, I don't really need to look too much further than my own family, culture, and society to see how it has impacted my sisters and I. We are the ones who wear makeup, some days because we feel ugly without it, but some days because we love it and just want to feel extra empowered. That in itself is mostly only likely because of our culture that you have to be perfect or beautiful to gain strength. Our jobs are all appropriate and predominantly run by females (let us not be confused by the main corporate or organization heads generally being male), and seen as great services to the community. Nutrition and modeling (by Angela) shows femininity and health, which is coveted among women because of the need society places over our heads for it. Cosmetology and hairstyling (by Amy) show beauty and purpose, helping the adage that women need to do their best to stay up to their own and everyone else's standards. Teaching (by me) shows nurturing and gentleness, which has been tied to women for at least a century now due to its likeness of motherhood, which was a main purpose of housewives and marriage back when women were thought of as useless otherwise. I came across another article talking about "strategies women used to challenge their subordinate positions" and further examined "the institutionalization of patriarchy, internalization of gender identity, and how women have resisted oppression based on gender" (Thomas & Davies, 2005). We have been successful, but is it in part due to the fact that we chose future outcomes that were

widely acceptable among women? Would it have been worse if we had chosen male-dominated fields?

In my classroom, I intend to bring knowledge to my students about questioning and understanding their backgrounds, and with that... knowledge. Even though worksheets suck, I could create a paper that had critical thinking questions regarding the differences (and similarities) of what my student likes, versus what their family or community likes. The older the students, the more we can look into the patterns of why some things seem possible for their futures (like construction work or an office job) and why others seem completely unattainable (such as doctors or the president). We would recognize what comes from their race, community, and gender norms and identify ways of jumping over them, and ways to think bigger for themselves and ways to succeed. We could put these papers on the walls and they could get creative by cutting out magazine images of things they like or drawing pictures of what we have come up with.

Alexa's Story

My elementary school is a school that has pre-kindergarten through 5th grade. It is located on the outskirts of Dallas, Texas. The student population was Hispanic, African American, and a few white students. Most of the students who attended this school came from low-income families. The school holds a lot of programs to get people from the community involved. With the school being quite big most of their programs are held outside when the weather is nice outside.



Figure 7: My classmates and I in summer camp in 2011

When I was in fourth grade, I had a teacher name, Mrs. Santander. She was a short Salvadorian full of energy. This is the type of teacher you could always be playful and dance within the middle of the classroom when we weren't doing anything. But when it was time to learn, she was serious, and she was strict. She had clear expectations for all us and expected nothing but the best from us because according to her, we are capable of that and so much more.

Mrs. Santander was also the teacher who would push our curiosity. Anytime we had free time in the day she would take us to the greenhouse that we had in our school parking lot. She had been cultivating vegetation and teaching how to take care of the world around us. She pushed my scientific curiosity to the max. Anytime I would learn something new that had to do with science I would go straight to her and go on a wild rant about a new science documentary that I saw. I would always want to do experiments in her class or learn anything that had to do with the human body, our surroundings, animals, anything science pretty much.

That year I remember hearing a lot about my school going through some hard times because of the TAKS test grades. The principal wanted for us to focus only on the subjects that we were testing over reading, writing, and math. So not a lot of science was taught that year. To put matters worse in my 10-year-old mind, some of the criminals in our community had broken our greenhouse. The school didn't want to pay for a new one because it was not necessary for us to have one. So, for the rest of the semester, in my head, my life was ruined.

At the end of my spring semester, Mrs. Santander called my mom to schedule a meeting to talk about me. I was really worried at that point, I thought I failed a 4th grade or even the TAKS test. My mom goes to my school and my worried mind is right next to her. Mrs. Santander wanted to share that over the semester I was very upset over the fact that we didn't really do any science activities and she was upset that she couldn't really teach us. She didn't want me to leave 4th-grade upset so she found a two-month science summer program for me to attend. I started to cry because I was so excited and before I could say anything my mom asked, "How much does it cost?" At that point, I was wishing it was free or that money would fall from the sky honestly. Mrs. Santander said she found a fee waiver and the whole summer camp was free. I was going to be able to learn about taking care of our forest, raising baby chicks, going canoeing and collecting water samples, catching bugs and creating an insect display. Two whole months of just science. My mom ended up giving signing my permission slips, and my 10-year-old mind exploded.

Because of Mrs. Santander, I got to experience the best summer camp I have ever been in my life. I was able to do all the things she describes and more. I was able to feed that pythons, learn about the earth and how it forms volcanoes and how earthquakes happen, taking care of the livestock, learn about astrology, learn about global warming, etc. Thanks to her, she introduced

me to a whole world of wonders and for my love for learning in science. I could never thank her enough for finding this opportunity for me. This was the best summer I ever have with kids from other schools from the Dallas district (Figure 7). When I came back for fifth grade, I to her classroom and went on a rant about how my summer went and about everything I learned.

Looking back at Mrs. Santander, I realized she did a lot for us. Out of the kindness of her heart, she wanted for us to find some type of interest in science. She did not have to take us to the greenhouse and show us how to grow and maintain the plants healthy. She didn't have to find a science camp for me either, but she did it because she knew I had a passion for it. Mrs. Santander was also a soccer coach for my elementary school and a mom at the time of kids of the same age as us.

According to Noddings (1999), "...as we engage our students in dialogue, we learn about their needs, working habits, interests, and talents. We gain important ideas from them about how to build our lessons and plan for their individual progress." In other words, the more we get to know the child and the more we care for them, as teachers, we will get a better understanding of how to help the students and what we will need to do to do to help them succeed. Finding the students interest can help us do our jobs a lot easier. We will be able to know how to teach the child based on the student's interest. And that's what Mrs. Santander did, she found something that most of us liked and had us hooked from the minute she showed us.

When I am a teacher I will talk to every student individually and see what they like, find their interest and incorporate it into the classroom. Because if the students are doing something that they like they will actually want to come to class and will want to learn. I love doing hands-on projector any kinesthetic activities and I will be incorporating that into my students learning. For math, we can use everyday objects to figure out the questions that we have. We can do

science projects in class in groups or as a class. If they are into history, we can do historical reenactments of whatever time period we are learning about. I feel like doing activities like that will get the students to be engaged and learning and think that is every teacher's dream.

Conclusions & Future Considerations

This process was a transformative experience for not only the teacher candidates, but me as a professor. As I read through each of their narratives, I often found myself feeling surprised. I had my own assumption... my own unacknowledged prejudice that needed to be addressed. What I thought I knew about my students, I soon came to see was just the same learned prejudice that I was trying to get my students to recognize and combat.

Through helping my teacher candidates navigate this process, I realized several things. First, teacher candidates are not shown how much research plays a role in their professional work as educators. Not only that, but true qualitative, narrative inquiry is markedly absent from the curriculum. This must change. Second, I learned that students are at the beginning stages of understanding their identity and how this identity was formed. Throughout the semester, I had my teacher candidates adamantly share their viewpoints, but, when pressed to explain why, found that they could not. Thus, an inclusion of identity studies as well as an inclusion of institutionalized structures of inequity must be present in the curriculum. Lastly, the teacher candidates must be guided through a meaning-making process like this memory trigger autoethnography. Teacher candidates can deconstruct their experiences and grow from them. This growth doesn't have to remain on an individual level but can lead to lasting implications in the classroom and beyond.

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